



## Hedges and boosters in plenary speakers' conference abstracts vs. novice researchers' conference abstracts<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Conference abstracts are essential components of academic studies as potential participants decide to attend the session based on what they get from the content of the abstracts. However, conference abstract writing has received relatively less attention compared to research article and thesis abstracts. Representing and summarizing the whole presentation in a limited space requires competence. In writing a conference abstract, one should take an academic speaking position by claiming significance, credibility and novelty. In academic conferences, there are two or three invited plenary speakers who are very experienced, full -fledged academics and in the concurrent sessions, many novice researchers who are often at the very beginning of their academic studies. Novice researchers' abstracts are being assessed by scientific committees while plenary speakers' abstracts are exempt from this review process. Academics, whether they are experienced or novice, make use of lexical hedging and boosting strategies that show their degree of confidence in the truth of their statements but also reveal their opinions and attitudes to the reader. In this small scale study, 10 plenary speakers' conference abstracts and 10 novice researchers' conference abstracts are chosen randomly from different conferences and the aim is to analyze if there is any variation between plenary speakers' conference abstracts and novice researchers' conference abstracts in the use of hedging and boosting strategies with regard to frequency counts on lexical bases.

**Key words:** hedges, boosters, abstracts, plenary speakers, novice researchers.

## Açılıř konuřmasını yapan akademisyenlerle yeni arařtırmacıların konferans özlerinde kullandıkları kaçınımlar ve güçlendiriciler

### Öz

Konferans özleri, akademik çalışmaların önemli bir parçasıdır. Katılımcılar, hangi oturuma katılacakları kararını genellikle konferans özlerine bakarak vermektedir. Ancak, konferanslar için öz yazımı, makale ve tez özlerine göre literatürde nispeten daha az ilgi görmüřtür. Sınırlı kelime sayısıyla bir bildirinin özünü vermek beceri gerektirmektedir. Bir arařtırmacı, öz yazarken, yazdığı şeyin önemini vurgulamaya, yeniliğini ortaya koymaya ve inandırıcılığını sağlamaya çalışmaktadır. Akademik konferanslarda tecrübeli, alanın öncülerinden bir iki akademisyen açılıř konuřmasını yapar. İleriki oturumlarda ise genellikle akademik kariyerinin başında olan arařtırmacılar bildirilerini sunmaktadır. Yeni arařtırmacıların gönderdikleri özler, bilimsel komiteler tarafından incelenirken, açılıř konuřmasını yapan akademisyenlerin özleri bu deęerlendirme sürecinden

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muafır. Tecrübeli ya da yeni arařtırmacı olsun, akademisyenler, sözcüksel kaçınmalardan ve güçlendiricilerden yararlanmaktadır. Bu öğeler ortaya konulan savlara duydukları güvenin derecesini ve okurlara karşı tutumlarını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu küçük ölçekli çalışmada, 10 açılış konuşması yapan akademisyenin, 10 yeni arařtırmacının konferans özleri incelenmiş ve kaçınma, güçlendirme stratejileri kullanım sıklıkları açısından herhangi bir farklılık olup olmadığı incelenmeye çalışılmıştır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** kaçınmalar, güçlendiriciler, açılış konuşmacıları, yeni arařtırmacılar.

## Introduction

Academics, teachers and practitioners attend conferences not only as a participant but also as a presenter as part of their continuing professional development and academic career. Presenting in conferences is taken as an important element in one's academic career. In order to be selected as a presenter, researchers write and send their conference abstracts to organizing committees in order to be assessed by scientific committees. While novice researchers' abstracts are being assessed to be included in concurrent sessions, there are plenary speakers who are invited to give a talk after the opening ceremony. In contrast to concurrent sessions, plenary speeches are often given by one of the leading professors in the field of ELT. Conference abstract writing focuses on writing in connection with an academic oral event and some of its features can be determined by the requirements of the call of papers as announced by the organizing committee. Novice researchers are trying to convince the scientific committee that their study is worth listening. Conference abstracts are the point at which participants are hooked or not. Abstract writing attracts attention as "a well-written abstract, according to the norms of the discipline in question, would be more likely to attract a larger readership than otherwise" (Samraj, 2002, p. 42). This piece of writing may also appear in conference proceedings. Swales (1990, p. 178) pinpoints that "getting a presentation together typically enhances the likelihood of the presenter eventually getting up with an acceptable RA [Research Article]". Therefore, conference abstract writing requires further studies.

Claiming insider credibility is critical in research genres. In this sense, abstract is one of the research genres and needs to be taken seriously. Hyland (2000b, p. 78) mentions that:

Readers make judgments about the credibility of the writer as an informed colleague, a bona fide member of the discourse community who is able to speak with authority on the subject.

Hedges and boosters are central elements in academic discourse that convey one's degree of commitment to their assertions and certainty degree while distinguishing their opinions from facts (Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2016; Hyland, 2000a). Hyland (2000b, p. 91) emphasizes that "these choices are to some extent influenced by individual factors, such as self-confidence and experience". Excluding intrinsic factors such as personality and the level of self-confidence, the focus in this study is on the frequency counts of lexical hedges and boosters in conference abstracts. The data in this study are built of conference abstracts from leading international ELT conferences in Turkey. This study is built on what is already known about abstracts, hedges and boosters, but adds to the growing bulk of literature by taking conference abstracts into consideration. In this research area, there doesn't exist a study conducted in order to compare plenary speakers' and novice researchers' conference abstracts. To fill this gap, the aim of this paper is to analyze if there is any variation between plenary speakers' conference abstracts and novice researchers' conference abstracts in the use of hedging and boosting strategies with respect to frequency counts on lexical bases.

## Hedges and boosters

No matter what kind of text it is, the aim of a writer is to interact with the reader. To accomplish this aim, writers make use of various linguistic devices. In Hyland (2004, p. 134)'s terms, metadiscourse "refers to the linguistic devices writers employ to shape their arguments to the needs and expectations of their target readers". It has two sub-categories as interactive resources and interactional resources. Hedges and boosters are parts of interactional resources. As Kim and Lim (2013, p. 130) underline "these metadiscourse features control the level of personality in a text". In Supasiraprapa and de Costa's terms (2017, p. 871), they "display the writer's opinion or attitude, and help him or her establish a relationship with the data, the arguments, and the reader". Hedges and boosters show that "statements don't just communicate ideas, they also indicate the writer's attitude to them and to readers" (Hyland, 2000b, p.88). Hedges such as 'might/perhaps/possible' withhold writer's full commitment to proposition while boosters such as 'in fact/definitely/it is clear that' emphasize force or writer's certainty in proposition (Hyland, 2000b). Also, hedges "also allow writers to open a discursive space where readers can dispute their interpretations" (Hyland, 2005, p. 179). In Yagiz and Demir's terms (2014, p. 260), "hedging can be defined as a tentative language to avoid any certainty or to mitigate the statements to able to avert possible criticism". On the other hand, boosters "allow writers to express their certainty in what they say and to mark involvement with the topic and solidarity with their audience" (Hyland, 2005, p. 179). In Vázquez and Giner (2009, p. 219)'s terms, "they are both two sides of the same coin in the sense that they both contribute to the persuasive import of academic communication".

In the reviewed literature, there is a growing body of literature on these metadiscourse features. Hamamcı (2007) analyzed hedges in the research articles of non-native speakers and native speakers. He found out that non-native speakers employed hedges more in introduction section while native speakers use hedges in discussion and conclusion sections. Similarly, Yagiz and Demir (2014) examined hedges in research articles in terms of nativeness of the writers and found out that native writers are the ones who employed hedges the most in their research articles. It is not certain whether this case is culture specific or not. Samaie et al. (2014) analyzed hedging strategies employed by English and Persian writers in the introduction part of their research articles (RAs). It was found out that "English native writers used modal auxiliaries, evidential main verbs, adjectives and nouns in RAs more frequently than their Persian native writers' counterparts" (Samaie et al., 2014, p. 1678). Sogut (2014) examined native American students' and Turkish students' employment of stance adverbials as hedges and boosters in their English argumentative writings. The results demonstrated that "argumentative essays of students are characterized by extensive use of boosters, and less limited use of hedges. It is found out that Turkish non-native students use more diverse hedges and boosters than native American students use in their argumentative essays" (Sogut, 2014, p. 71). Atmaca (2016, p. 309) compared the use of hedges in M.A theses and Ph.D. theses and concluded that "hedges used in the Ph.D. dissertations nearly double those in the M.A. theses".

### Writing conference abstracts

Abstract can be defined as a representation or summary of an associated text and it is the readers' first encounter with the text or presentation. There are different types of abstracts such as thesis abstract, research article abstract and conference abstract. No matter what function it serves, it is taken for granted that abstract is a critical genre in academic discourse. As Pearce and Ferguson (2017) put it:

the abstract is a written elevator speech, delineating the critical elements of what has been done, or what is proposed to be done, and drawing the reader into the larger body of work the abstract represents (p. 452).

Abstracts can range from as few as 150 words to approximately 300 words. Brevity and clarity are important for all types of abstracts. As Swales (1990) points out title and abstract are both front matter and summary matter. Writing research article abstract and thesis abstract has been paid strict attention in the reviewed literature. Abstract writing constitutes a central and gatekeeping place in which writers show the significance of their research, the value of their work to the discipline and claim acceptance from their community as legitimate members and “it is a kind of a ‘pass’ to the world science market and research community that provides, if accepted, various opportunities for professional contacts and communication” (Yakhontova, 2002, p. 217). An abstract should be “sellable and credible” (Ekoc, 2010). As Curran (2016, p.2) pinpoints:

Resources such as ERIC and other databases often return only the abstract of a study, making it the primary piece of information available for determining whether to invest further effort to acquire the full text.

Abstracts share some characteristics with some genres but exhibit unique characteristics as well. The features of abstract writing can be summarized as such (Hyland, 2000b):

- o presenting the writer as competent community members
- o gaining readers' attention
- o persuading readers to read on
- o demonstrating that they have both something new and worthwhile to say
- o showing the professional credibility as an insider
- o promoting oneself and the paper
- o a way of conducting social relationships with the colleagues

Conference abstract shares the common characteristics that are mentioned above but has some key points that should not be missed. Many conference organizing committees give precise details and provide an abstract template form. They think that “a consistent format also assists reviewers when they evaluate submissions” (Beyea and Nicoll, 1998, p. 273). Evaluations will be done more smoothly based on the rubric given to reviewers. Potential presenters should not consider these expectations as arbitrary but try to conform to the details in order to be accepted as presenters by the scientific committee.

Abstracts have been seen as a challenging genre for several reasons. First, there is a restricted length of the abstract. Given the word and space constraints for abstracts, abstracts carry a lot of weight as it needs delicate attention and effort to explain one's research in a limited space. This feature is valid for all types of abstracts. Therefore, it doesn't give the researcher enough space for including the other authors' works. Without including the other's work, academic researchers try to offer a credible representation of themselves and their work. In that sense, they also evaluate their material and what they have done. Second, it has also been argued that abstracts have space limits and the number of words allowed is not quite enough (Swales & Feak, 2000). Third, it can be seen as a challenging genre which needs revising through many drafts. One of the difficulties is the selective representation. It doesn't aim to give the reader exact knowledge about the content of the paper but in an efficient way encourages reader for further examination in the paper. So abstract writing is one of the pieces of writing in advanced academic literacy, a writer should consider all the restrictions and conventions in writing the abstract. There are some common mistakes evident in writing abstracts such as “poor writing, a lack of important details, and misrepresentation of the manuscript” (Andrade, 2011). As Plakhotnik (2017, p. 52) notes, “a comprehensive abstract does not include information that is not in the manuscript in order

not to confuse or mislead the reader". There is sometimes mismatch between the content of an abstract and oral presentation. This may cause disappointment among conference participants.

Some scholars (Salager-Meyer, 1990) argue that research article or thesis abstract should reproduce the structuring of the full paper, reproducing the moves in the patterns of thought. However, its purpose, rhetorical construction and persuasive intent are all distinct from the article or thesis (Hyland, 2000b). In writing a conference abstract, the researchers follow similar moves.

Hyland (2000b, p. 67) offers a move-structure classification of abstracts shown in the table below:

**Table 1. Hyland's (2000b) classification of rhetorical moves in article abstracts**

Move	Function
Introduction	Establishes context of the paper and motivates the research or discussion.
Purpose	Indicates purpose, thesis or hypothesis, outlines the intention behind the paper.
Method	Provides information on design, procedures, assumptions, approach, data, etc.
Product	States main findings or results, the argument, or what was accomplished.
Conclusion	Interprets or extends results beyond scope of paper, draws inferences, points to applications or wider implications.

Hyland (2000b) takes attention to the fact that less than 5 per cent of the papers he had analyzed contained all five steps in this sequence. The analysis of abstracts has pedagogic value since it can be safely presumed that a well-written abstract, according to the norms of the discipline in question, would be more likely to attract a larger readership than otherwise.

There is a growing body of research on abstracts in the reviewed literature. Although abstracts are restricted in length, they are suitable for genre investigation. Abstracts have been seen in the literature as an independent discourse. Some studies compared thesis abstracts with research article abstracts. El-Dakhs (2018) compared thesis abstracts and research article abstracts and found out that they "represent two distinct genres which greatly influence the writing of all their sections, including abstracts" (El-Dakhs, 2018, p. 58). Some further studies on abstracts have focused on moves and linguistic features. For instance, Hyland (2000b, p. 63) analyzed 800 articles to "determine how writers use this genre to typically situate themselves and their work in their disciplines, how they display credibility and 'membership'". Gillaerts and Van de Velde (2010) analyzed 72 research article abstracts in terms of interactional metadiscourse. Onder-Ozdemir and Longo (2014) also focused on metadiscourse in Turkish and USA postgraduate students' abstracts in MA thesis written in English. They showed that "the incidence of evidential, endophorics, code glosses, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions were fewer in Turkish students' master thesis abstracts. However, Turkish students used metadiscourse transitions, frame markers and hedges more than USA students" (Onder-Ozdemir and Longo, 2014, p. 59). Montesi and Urdiciain (2005, p. 515) examined the types of problem abstracts may pose for potential users such as "terminology, over-condensation, lack and excess of information,

expectations and coherence, structure, register and layout". Harris (2006, p. 137) considered abstract writing as "the foundation for improved scholarly writing" and offered a model consisting three steps to teach abstract writing: "(1) laying the foundation, (2) communicating expectations and evaluation criteria, and (3) scaffolding for success" (Ibid, p.143). Ufnalska and Hartley (2009) focused on the quality of abstracts and contrasted rating scales with two other methods of evaluation. Hu and Cao (2011, p. 2795) analyzed 649 abstracts from 8 journals of applied linguistics in Chinese- and English-medium and indicated that "abstracts published in English-medium journals used more hedges than the ones published in Chinese-medium journals and the abstracts of empirical research articles used significantly more boosters than the non-empirical academic articles". Afshar and Bagherieh (2014, p. 1820) analyzed hedges in "40 MA/MS abstracts of Persian Literature and Civil Engineering theses written both in Persian and English based on the taxonomy of hedges by Salager-Meyer (1994)". However, in the literature, the focus has been on research article and thesis abstracts, but conference abstracts didn't get the attention that they deserve. To fill this gap in the literature, this study will focus on conference abstracts.

## Method

20 conference abstracts from international conferences in Turkey were selected randomly to be the corpus of the study. In this small-scale study, 10 of them were plenary speakers' abstracts while 10 of them were abstracts from concurrent sessions. The corpora of plenary speakers' abstracts contain 1727 words and the corpora of novice researchers contain 2198 words. It should be noted that plenary speakers tend to write shorter abstracts when compared to speakers in the concurrent sessions. They are not supposed to conform to the restrictions and expectations given in the call of papers. In order to detect hedges and boosters in conference abstracts, Hyland's (2000b, p. 188-189) list of items expressing doubt and certainty were used (see Appendix). Some features such as using or avoiding passives, first person singular and plural pronouns, inanimate subjects were added to the list. They are shown below with some examples from the abstracts.

## Results and discussion

As for findings, the presence of modal verbs, reporting verbs and other forms of lexical items that show interactional metadiscourse were coded. In the table, the percentages given below for each item are out of 1727 words for plenary speakers' abstracts and out of 2198 words for novice researchers' abstracts. It was seen that novice researchers made use of hedges more frequently than plenary speakers. The use of a great number of hedges in their abstracts suggests that novice researchers cautiously anticipate readers' reactions. From Table 2, it can be seen that passives constitute almost half of the hedging devices used by novice researchers.

**Table 2. Hedges employed by the researchers**

Plenary Speakers' Use of Lexical Hedges		Novice Researchers' Use of Lexical Hedges	
Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Assumption (1)	(% 0.0579)	Almost (1)	(% 0.0455)

Belief (1)	(% 0.0579)	Certain (1)	(% 0.0455)
Maybe (1)	(% 0.0579)	Implication (1)	(% 0.0455)
Possible (4)	(% 0.2316)	Likely (1)	(% 0.0455)
Suggest (1)	(% 0.0579)	May (2)	(% 0.0909)
Would (2)	(% 0.11581)	Might (1)	(% 0.0455)
We (5)	(% 0.28952)	Most (4)	(% 0.1820)
Passives (7)	(% 0.40533)	Often (1)	(% 0.0455)
Inanimate nouns (8)	(% 0.46323)	Seen (1)	(% 0.0455)
		Seem (1)	(% 0.0455)
		Should (1)	(% 0.0455)
		Sometimes (1)	(% 0.0455)
		Suppose (1)	(% 0.0455)
		Would (1)	(% 0.0455)
		We (4)	(% 0.1820)
		Passives (37)	(% 1.6833)
		Inanimate nouns (22)	(% 1.0010)
Total (30)	(% 1.7371)	Total (81)	(% 3.6852)

It was seen that most hedges were expressed impersonally by novice researchers. Impersonalisation strategies include passives and nominalization. Rather than cognitive verbs such as “think and believe”, passives were highly used by novice researchers. In the following case, the researchers employed passives to report the steps of the research:

The topics and related authentic reading along with visual materials were sent and given to the participants in advance. The elicitation tasks of semi-structured interviews and online platform were

used to collect data. The participants were also involved in data analysis process to provide reliability of the study (AN3).

Afterwards, students are asked to answer certain questions about the movie to evaluate the differences between the groups (AN6).

Verbs such as “show, demonstrate” are combined with inanimate subjects, a common practice in novice researchers' abstracts. They wanted to be seen objective as they distanced themselves from their findings. In order to avoid criticism, they employed hedging strategies.

But the results also revealed the challenges that teachers face, and some obstacles for them during the integration process (AN9).

The findings suggest the need for EFL teachers to be provided with in-service trainings on this issue and with culturally rich course materials at appropriate levels (AN9).

It can be seen that one major difference between plenary speakers and novice researchers is the heavy use of passives and inanimate nouns in novice researchers' abstracts. As Samaie et al. (2014, p. 1684) put “hedging also indicates that writers know the rules of conduct by showing concern regarding the face of the others”. Similarly, Hyland (2000b, p. 93) states that:

Mitigating certainty allows writers to take a stance towards their claims while protecting them from potentially critical responses from readers.

As Ekoc (2010, p. 57) emphasizes:

It shouldn't be underscored that the use of hedges reflects a certain maturity in writing. On the other hand, the high frequency of use of these strategies can be a marker of novice writers, but the absence of these strategies in students' academic writing may result in inadequate writing.

In line with Samraj's study (2002), first-person plural pronoun “we” is considered as a hedging device in this study as the use of first-person plural pronouns denote that the responsibility is shared among researchers who contributed to the presentation as in the following examples:

When we examine the advantages of using ICT in vocabulary as well as in language teaching, first of all, we realize that it is a learner centered approach and helps the learners become autonomous learners (AN2).

Novice researchers employed hedges like “may, might, likely” that show uncertainty and indicated that information is presented as opinion.

However, the kind of the question and the strategies teachers follow after asking a question may show differences (AN8).

Many English language instructors and scholars alike have been interested in searching the effectiveness of various methods and strategies which might be used in the EFL classes so as to enable pupil's acquirement of language skills and enhance the learning and teaching process (AN6).

Plenary speakers seemed not to employ hedges as much as novice researchers and they seem relatively more assertive and certain in their claims. This may stem from the fact that they are full-fledged academics in their fields. Some realization of hedges by plenary speakers can be seen in the following examples:

In a world increasingly characterized by labels and divides, it would be naïve to think that the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) will be immune to and unaffected by these patterns (AP3).

This talk will include information on the origins of critical thinking, and its role in education and suggest ways for integrating the critical thinking instruction into EFL reading/writing classes (AP9).

**Table 3. Boosters employed by the researchers**

Plenary Speakers' Use of Lexical Boosters		Novice Researchers' Use of Lexical Boosters	
Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Clear (1)	(% 0.0579)	Actually (1)	(% 0.0455)
Determine (1)	(% 0.0579)	Demonstrate (2)	(% 0.0909)
Expect (2)	(% 0.1158)	Determine (1)	(% 0.0455)
Given that (1)	(% 0.0579)	Evidence (1)	(% 0.0455)
Know (1)	(% 0.0579)	Expect (1)	(% 0.0455)
More (1)	(% 0.0579)	Find (1)	(% 0.0455)
Particularly (1)	(% 0.0579)	Given that (1)	(% 0.0455)
Will (12)	(% 0.69484)	Inevitable (1)	(% 0.0455)
Won't (1)	(% 0.0579)	More (5)	(% 0.2275)
I (5)	(% 0.28952)	Show (5)	(% 0.2275)
		Will (6)	(% 0.2730)
Total (26)	(% 1.5055)	Total (25)	(% 1.1374)

Table 3 indicates that plenary speakers and novice researchers employed approximately the same amount of boosters in their abstracts. With “will”, researchers expressed the certainty of expected outcomes. From the table above, it is evident that plenary speakers combined first-person singular pronoun with “will”. Therefore, the first-person singular pronoun “I” is included as a booster to the list by the researcher as the use of first-person singular pronoun combined with “will” shows the presence of the writer and his/her individual contribution to the disciplinary community. Although the first-person singular pronoun is associated with hedges in some categorizations, it is categorized as a booster in this study. As a form of authority and self-promotion, there are many occurrences of the first-person pronoun “I” in plenary speakers' abstracts. In the following examples, one can see such instances:

In this talk, I will touch upon some of the specific areas of foreign language classroom interaction (e.g., questioning strategies, giving feedback, use of L1), and how to reflect on these (AP1).

I will comment on the new English language programme specifically designed for the 2017-2018 Academic Year (AP2).

In academic writing, researchers are suggested not to use first-person singular pronoun. It can be assumed that plenary speakers felt more free when they structured their abstracts while novice researchers cannot ignore established rules within academic community. Maybe, the reason why conference participants attend plenary talks is to get their personal opinions. Therefore, the use of first-person singular pronouns is understandable. Novice researchers tended to avoid first-person pronoun as “many saw it as inappropriate for novices, believing that it conflicted with the requirement of objectivity and formality in academic writing” (Hyland, 2004, p. 143).

On the other hand, novice researchers used “will” with inanimate nouns or first-person plural pronouns:

This paper will discuss the benefits of using drama as a teaching strategy and its power to engage all learning styles (AN1).

We will explain both advantages and disadvantages of using ICT in vocabulary teaching and learning process in addition to giving several examples of its usage during the presentation (AN2).

Novice researchers preferred to use discourse-oriented verbs like “show, demonstrate” as boosters.

The results of these studies demonstrate that movies in EFL classrooms have a significant role in the language learning and teaching environment (AN6).

The results obtained from the teachers' perception of updating, reflection and collaboration activities showed that most of the teachers wanted to develop their professionally as long as the activities were meaningful, effective, efficient and technology-based (AN4).

## Conclusion

An abstract is the representation of a proposed work or a completed work. In both cases, it should highlight the work in a way that will engage the reader. Abstracts are the pieces of texts that will be read by far greater numbers than the manuscript. As for conference abstracts, potential participants will see the title and abstract to decide which session s/he will attend. Therefore, an abstract should be “sellable and credible” (Ekoc, 2010). Time is precious for participants and they want to attend to the sessions that meet their needs. Therefore, abstract writing is not a simple reduction of the presentation but show the credibility of the speaker. Plenary speakers are invited presenters, so they are exempt from the review process and elimination of potential participants. This affects the way they structure their abstracts.

This paper focused on the hedging and boosting strategies employed by plenary speakers and novice researchers in their conference abstracts. As it is a small scale study, the findings cannot be generalized. Based on the comparison, it can be seen that novice researchers' abstracts were characterized by abundant use of passives and impersonalization strategies as hedges. The least difference in number appeared in boosting strategies. However, it is not surprising to see that plenary speakers expressed themselves in a more confident way and used the first-person singular pronoun while there is no occurrence of the first-person singular pronoun in novice researchers' abstracts, which makes them less assertive. With the occurrence of first-person singular, plenary speakers didn't distance themselves from their study but took responsibility instead. They asserted their authority.

In graduate and post-graduate studies, abstract is a kind of genre that needs attention as graduates and post-graduates will write abstracts for their theses, research papers, and conferences and so on. In

academic writing courses, special attention can be given to abstract writing as novice researchers will try to be part of the discourse community of their discipline by writing conference abstracts as potential presenters. Graduates and post-graduates should learn to conform to a formal structure while navigating their tone, voice and attitude. Therefore, it is also important to teach graduate and post-graduate students to select necessary hedging and boosting strategies. One should learn to balance these features in their pieces of writing. These features help one to avoid face-threatening acts while showing certainty and credibility. More extensive studies will help for the more clear-cut preferences of hedges and boosters among experienced and novice researchers. This analysis can also be done in different disciplines to understand disciplinary variations.

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### Appendix

Hyland's (2000b, p. 188-189) list of hedges:

HEDGES			
About	Frequently	Perhaps	Speculate
Admittedly	(in) general	Plausible	Suggest
Almost	Generally	Possibility	Superficially
(not) always	Guess	Possible(ly)	Suppose

Apparently	Hypothesise	Postulate	Surmise
Appear	Hypothetically	Predict	Suspect
Approximately	Ideally	Prediction	Technically
Argue	(we) imagine	Predominantly	Tend
Around	Implication	Presumably	Tendency
Assume	Imply	Presume	In theory
Assumption	Indicate	Probable(ly)	Theoretically
Basically	Infer	Probability	Typically
My/our belief	Interpret	Provided that	Uncertain
I believe	Largely	Propose	Unclear
A certain X	Likely	Open to question	Unlikely
Certain extent	Mainly	Questionable	Unsure
I /we claim	May	Quite	Usually
Conceivably	Maybe	Rare(ly)	Virtually
Conjecture	Might	Rather	Would
Consistent with	More or less	Relatively	
Contention	Most	Seen (as)	
Could	Not necessarily	Seem	
Deduce	Normally	Seemingly	
Discern	Occasionally	Seldom	
Doubt	Often	(general) sense	
Essentially	Ostensibly	Should	
Estimate	Partly	Shouldn't	
Evidently	Partially	Somewhat	
Formally	Perceive	Sometimes	

Hyland's (2000b, p. 188) list of boosters:

BOOSTERS		
actually	in fact	precise(ly)

always	the fact that	prove
assured (ly)	we find	(without) question
certainly	given that	quite
certainty	impossible(ly)	reliable(ly)
certain that	improbable(ly)	show
clear (ly)	Indeed	sure(ly)
conclude	inevitable(ly)	surmise
conclusive(ly)	we know	we think
confirm	it is known that/to	true
convince	(at) least	unambiguous(ly)
convincingly	manifest(ly)	unarguably
couldn't	more than	undeniab(ly)
of course	Must	undoubted(ly)
decided(ly)	necessarily	unequivocal(ly)
definite(ly)	Never	unmistakab(ly)
demonstrate	no doubt	unquestionabl(ly)
determine	obvious (ly)	well-known
doubtless	particularly	will
is essential	Patently	won't
evidence	Perceive	wouldn't
expect	plain(ly)	wrong(ly)